

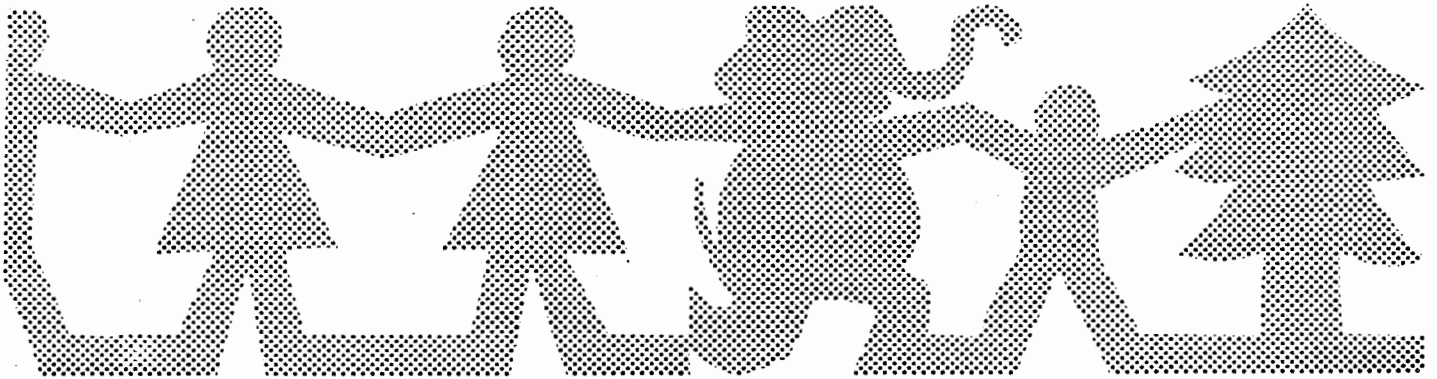
# Bulletin

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## THE BIRDS OF ST FRANCIS



Each year, millions of migrating birds are killed *en route* through Mediterranean countries. Italy's record is typical: hunters there have so depleted the countryside of birds of passage and native game that they have crossed their own purpose — most of the country's table game is now imported from other countries' deep-freeze stocks at unnecessary expense.

More profound issues are of course involved, especially in the country which gave birth to the 'Patron Saint of Ecology', St Francis of Assisi, whose message of reconciliation between man and beast seems to have fallen on deaf ears in present-day Italy.

In 1982, Bert Schwarzschild visited Mount Subasio, near Assisi — scene of St Francis' life's work. He came expecting to watch birds but found only a litter of shotgun cartridges: the sound of gunfire was the only evidence of wildlife in the area surrounding the shrine.

On returning to his home (and Assisi's sister) town of San Francisco, USA, Schwarzschild published an account of his visit in the magazine of the National Audubon Society: it provoked concerned but not entirely unanimous response in Ita-

ly and America. A campaign to save the wildlife of Mount Subasio culminated this September in a significant declaration,

calling for a total ban on hunting on Mount Subasio and the creation of a National Park to protect the whole area and an official application to Unesco for Assisi to be listed as a World Heritage site. Several IUCN members, including the National Audubon Society, the Liga Italiana Protezione Uccelli, World Wildlife Fund-Italy and *Italia Nostra*, supported the Charter: the Italian Government, which had at first steered clear of a confrontation with the country's powerful and vocal hunting lobby by reserving judgment on the scheme, unbent to the extent of sending the new Minister for the Environment, Sr Alfredo Biondi, to observe the event which accompanied the signing of the Charter. Sr Biondi personally helped release twelve wild hawks to mark the occasion: these, the organisers (not to mention the hawks) hope will soon be joined by other re-introduced wildlife. The next step will be to form a working group of local and regional officials, environmental and wildlife protection organisations and university scientists to devise practical ways to put the declaration to work, including the foundation of an Environmental Education Centre which will be the first of its kind in Italy.